

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND AGENCY
ORGANIZATION
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
United States House of Representatives

“Telecommuting: A 21st Century Solution to Traffic Jams and Terrorism”

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Introduction

Chairman Porter, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Danette Campbell. I would like to thank you for inviting the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) to testify today. I commend you for holding today's hearing and for working hard to ensure that our Federal government is in the vanguard of telecommuting efforts.

As PTO's "Telework Coordinator," I am responsible for overseeing the implementation and operations of telecommuting programs, and I serve as a point of contact on such programs for the Committees on Appropriations.

The USPTO is strongly committed to teleworking. As cited in the 2007 Science, State, Justice, Commerce, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill passed by the House, 220 trademark examining attorneys are working from home, representing 80% of the total trademark examining corps. We are working to increase the number of patent examiners teleworking from home to at least one day per week. In addition, 255 patent examiners have relinquished their office space to work from home four days per week.

USPTO Corporate Business Strategy

As you are aware, the workplace today goes beyond the walls that surround an office building. According to the International Telework Association and Council, 44 million Americans worked from home at least part of the time in 2004. And, according to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments 2004 *State of the Commute Report*, 12.8%, or 320,000 of the region's workers are currently teleworking at least 1.5 days per week.

Changing the boundaries of old workplace patterns allows for decreased commute time, greater control over workloads, and even a more balanced lifestyle. This all translates into increased employee productivity and satisfaction, as well as higher employee retention.

At the USPTO, we are expanding to create a workforce that can be anywhere, any time. The nature of our patent and trademark work certainly facilitates robust telework programs. But we hope our telework programs have an even broader impact. We hope that the USPTO's decision to incorporate telework as a corporate business strategy and

for human capital flexibility will help reduce traffic congestion in the National Capital region and – in a very competitive job market - enable the USPTO to hire approximately 3,000 new examiners over the next 6 years.

During my brief tenure at USPTO, I have had an opportunity to witness a commitment by USPTO leadership to support the telework initiative, encourage employee participation, and supply remote workers with the tools they need to be successful.

Intensive planning goes into deploying our telework programs and we view telework as an innovative approach to Federal work. The USPTO telework and hoteling programs are strategies for recruiting and retaining valuable employees and are models for other Federal agencies that would like to do the same.

Prior to participating in a telework program, each employee receives instruction on how to access USPTO systems remotely. In addition, each teleworking employee must be fully versed in the USPTO's "Rules of the Road"- a guide that explains employee responsibilities when using USPTO information technology resources. The USPTO has an extensive IT security infrastructure and strong security policy that work together to ensure that both personally identifiable information and business sensitive information are adequately protected from loss or theft. These protections have been implemented throughout the USPTO Telework Program and help to prevent the possible occurrence of a sensitive information security breach.

Trademark Work at Home

On June 15, 2006, the Trademark Work at Home program received the **“Telework Program with Maximum Impact on Government”** award from the Telework Exchange. This award recognized that Trademarks has created an extremely successful telework program that can serve as a model for other government agencies. Further, Trademark’s telework program was praised as an innovative telework prototype by showing other agencies how to incorporate measurable performance goals in evaluating the performance of its teleworkers.

Established in 1997, the Trademark Work at Home program began as a feasibility pilot of eighteen teleworkers partnered to share physical offices and alternate days at home with days in the Office. Nine years later, this program is a leading, comprehensive program involving more than 220 employees (80% of eligible examining attorneys) who spend the majority of their workweek at home and share reservable space in the office through a hoteling arrangement. Employees make electronic reservations for their time in the office and perform the majority of their trademark examination duties at home. Each employee is provided with the necessary equipment to establish a secure connection to the agency’s network, and automated systems enable users to perform all of their examination duties electronically.

As a leader in the development of government telework programs, the Trademark Work At Home program has proven to be an innovative telework prototype. It combines management-by-objective with hoteling, which translates into documented space and

related cost savings for the USPTO. By incorporating measurable performance goals in the evaluation of worker performance, Trademarks has created a model of an extremely successful telecommuting program for government agencies.

Agencies facing budgetary issues, facilities dilemmas, and staffing shortfalls can follow the USPTO's lead in expanding its workforce without acquiring additional physical space. The Trademark Work At Home program also demonstrates that flexibility of both time and location enables employees to maximize efficiency of working hours and is reflected by an increase in an examining production gain by its teleworkers. The phenomenally low attrition rate experienced with these program participants establishes that agencies facing recruitment and retention problems can offer similar telecommuting options to attract and retain qualified workers.

Patents Hoteling Program

The Patents Hoteling Program, introduced in 2006, is a flexible telecommuting program that provides participants with the option to perform officially assigned duties at an alternative worksite during paid working hours. Major elements of this telework program include remote online access to all relevant USPTO patent business systems, job performance tools, patent information, patent application documentation, and incorporates the use of collaborative communication technologies. The Patents Hoteling Program includes a hoteling component whereby participants can remotely reserve workspace for required time spent in hoteling suites, located throughout the USPTO's Alexandria campus. To date, approximately 320 Patent examiners have relinquished their

office space to work from home four days per week. At this rate, 3000 Patent examiners will be working from home by 2011.

Using USPTO-supplied equipment, participants can remotely connect to PTOnet, and view patent applications, perform prior art searches, create and electronically sign necessary documents, access timesheet reporting, email and other support systems available at the USPTO.

In addition to serving as a future model for Federal telework and hoteling, the Patents Hoteling Program is providing employees with an improved quality of life by reducing their commute, giving them more options to balance work and family, as well as reducing stress. The Patents program is realizing a reduction in USPTO office space requirements associated with increased hiring goals and achieving innovative means of flexibility and responsiveness of the Patents organization to meet its mission with respect to increasing workloads and changing technology.

The Patents Hoteling Program positions the agency to hire new Patent examiners without incurring additional real estate costs, eliminates four days of commuting time, which translates into weeks of additional time for the employee to achieve an improved balance between work and home, and has made Patent examining in the Washington metropolitan region more attractive to potential candidates who currently reside outside of the region. This telework program will enable the USPTO to recruit from a highly qualified hiring pool and retain existing valuable employees.

In addition to providing superior technology for an effective and productive telework environment, the Patents Hoteling Program provides comprehensive training to hoteling examiners and to their supervisors. The examiner training includes information about using remote access tools, equipment set-up, collaboration tools, and troubleshooting for hardware/software problems. Supervisory training addresses supervisory responsibilities, techniques, and strategies for managing the performance of employees in a hoteling environment, and emphasizes performance-based management and communication techniques for successful employee performance. To date, 310 supervisors have participated in this training.

A Progressive Model

I believe that the Trademark Work at Home Program and the Patents Hoteling Program are progressive efforts that will continue to serve as models for Federal agencies and that they are some of the best telework programs that the Federal government has to offer.

A USPTO employee recently sent the following note, which I thought, might be of interest to the Committee:

“Since I have been on telework, I have found that my initial apprehensions were unfounded and that I am now an enthusiastic supporter of telework, including managing staff remotely. Arranging to get the equipment, to set it up and to learn to use it was no problem at all. I don’t feel isolated when working at home. I find that I have no problem staying in touch with and productively interacting with staff or co-

workers. When I need help, help is always readily available. As for keeping the work flowing, I am at least as productive as I was when working full time at the Office, and in many ways, more productive. With all of my normal Office tools available and working just as well at home as at the Office, I find myself in a familiar Office setting doing the same kinds of work I do at the Office. In addition, it has been great to be more available to help at home when the need occurs. That availability, plus the time saved, and being freed from a difficult commute cannot be underestimated. Whatever my initial expectations were with respect to going on the Patent Managers Telework Program, those expectations were far exceeded when it came time to actually participate in the program. “

Conclusion

In conclusion, a successful telework program can mean better employee morale, higher levels of sustained performance, and reduced traffic congestion and air pollution. The USPTO has demonstrated that Telework works and is a winning proposition for our employees, our agency, and the American public. We appreciate this opportunity to testify before the Committee on this important issue.

Thank you.